

**Teachings of Bhagavad Gita: An Essence for Mental Equilibrium in the Present Pandemic Situation****Dr. Richa Kapoor Mehra**, Assistant Professor, Amity University, Noida, India

“When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to Bhagavad Gita and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. Those who meditate on the Gita will derive fresh joy and new meanings from it every day”<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** With these words, Gandhi explains the significant role of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita to overcome mental stress in crisis situation. As we are aware of the global crisis resulting from the coronavirus pandemic has led to many challenges and hardships for many people. Almost everyone including small children, youths, and senior citizens are impacted in some or the other way. The coronavirus pandemic has greatly affected lot of people, from students to potential employees/ businessmen almost all are mentally puzzled about the current pandemic crisis. Since we know that pandemic is a global problem, so we need a solution to overcome this problem causing mental stress and discomfort in many. Understanding the teachings of Bhagavad Gita is one of the most significant methods to overcome worries and maintain mental equilibrium. Bhagavad Gita is one of the most significant texts of Hindus. Teachings of Bhagavad Gita are universally applicable and can be easily practiced by the common people. It consists of three main teachings namely- Jnana-yoga, Karma-yoga and Bhakti-yoga.<sup>2</sup>

According to various schools of Indian philosophical thoughts, there are three main aspects of human beings and these aspects comprises of physical, mental and spiritual aspects. From the psychological point of view, human nature can be perceived as a synthesis of willing, knowing and feeling. In this paper I intend to showcase that the three teachings of Bhagavad Gita must be followed for the holistic development of human character and personality. Understanding teachings of Bhagavad Gita is significant for the stability of the intellect. Broadly speaking human personality is made up of the characteristic patters of thought/ knowing, behavior/ willingness and feelings/ emotions. Three components of knowing, willing and feeling are the basic parts of human nature, and the path of knowledge (Jnana-yoga), action (Karma-yoga) and devotion (bhakti yoga) relate to them. This paper is divided into three parts, the first part deals with Jnana-yoga or knowledge path of Bhagavad Gita and its relation to knowing. The second part deals with Karma-yoga or action path of Bhagavad Gita and its relation to willingness and the third part deals with Bhakti-yoga or devotion and its relation to feeling as one of the basic constituent of human nature.

Keywords: Nishkamakarma-yoga, Jnana-yoga, Bhakti-yoga, Bhagavad Gita, COVID19, Prakriti, Purusa.

**Introduction**

In the present time very man sees problems everywhere; the world is facing a crisis situation of pandemic. In these challenging times having outbreak of different mental contents is too obvious. Mostly people are in the state of fear and are anxious about their future. At times life is filled with restlessness, unhappiness and complications, negative qualities like anger, violence, conflict, pride and ego surrounds man and pre dominates the mind hence it becomes difficult to lead a peaceful life. The COVID-19 pandemic is the current situation causing stress and anxiety because it is disrupting normal life style of many people. Feeling of stress is an obvious feeling as nobody was prepared for such pandemic crisis. Now people are anxious about their future, about their jobs, students are anxious about their exams. Feeling of anxiety establishes when we believe that the present situation is worrisome and is out of our control. So by thinking about the future state of affairs, people become fearful and anxious. Everyone experiences anxiety at their own individual degree and intensity. So now the question arises since we are part of this challenging situation how can we uphold mental steadiness and deal with this unavoidable situation?

According to me for the holistic development of human behavior and mind, teachings of Bhagavad Gita play an essential role in one's life. The Bhagavad Gita is one of the greatest religious books of Hindus. It is believed to show the path to the lost, gives lucidity to the confused minds and provides wisdom to every being. The Bhagavad Gita is one of the most significant scriptural texts of Hindus. It is believed that the teaching of this text is addressed to each and every human being and benefit beings to overcome the worrisome situation, so that they can progress towards a bright future prospects. Teachings of Bhagavad Gita empowers humans to liberate himself from all limiting factors and reach a state of perfect mental balance, inner stability and mental peace, complete freedom from grief, fear and anxiety. The eighteen chapters of Gita revealed a human drama, the drama of the ascent of man from a state of utter dejection, sorrow and total breakdown and hopelessness to a state of perfect understanding, clarity, renewed strength and triumph.

<sup>1</sup> Gandhi, 1959: 22.

<sup>2</sup>Prabhupada, 1972: 6.47.

## I

Human beings are made up of three essential aspects, namely, knowing, willing and feeling and these characteristics can be associated with three fundamental teachings of Bhagavad Gita. The first teaching of Bhagavad Gita is 'Jnana-Yoga', 'Jnana' literally means 'knowledge' and 'Yoga' means 'Union'. This path of Gita is for a person of enquiry and rational temperament. Second teaching of Gita is known as 'Karma-Yoga', 'karma' means 'action' or 'for a person of action'. Third teaching is known as 'Bhakti-Yoga', 'bhakti' means 'devotion' and it is for the emotive personality of a being. 'Jnana' literally means 'knowledge', but in the context of yoga it means the process of meditative awareness which leads to illuminative wisdom. 'Jnana' refers to the knowledge gained through introspection which results into wisdom. It is gained through self-enquiry and self-realization. Since humans are the physical and mental beings, we cannot think of action-less beings. Purely unselfish action without any thought of returns or obligations is the highest aspect of the law of Jnana<sup>3</sup>.

As the Covid-19 pandemic has unfolded across the globe, virtually no dimension of social life has been untouched. This pandemic outbreak has taught humans a lesson and this lesson from Bhagavad Gita's perspective is the performance of one's duties without expecting any result from it. This point can be made clear with the help of an example- as in this crisis situation, mostly people are working from homes and students are attending classes from home using virtual medium. So from this perspective one's duty is be honest to one-selves and perform duties in a responsible way.

The real knowledge is to identify the impermanent nature of human beings. It helps us to overcome our egoistic attitude and desires and realizes who we are, it is considered as higher knowledge or the real knowledge. One has to realize the fact that our existence on this world is temporary and one day we will come to an end. Now the question arises- is there anything real in this world? According to the teachings of Bhagavad Gita, Brahman is the only reality. Real knowledge liberates us from the three impurities of human existences, namely egoism, desires and the illusion about the fact that we are different from the rest of the world. Knowledge helps us to differentiate between the real and unreal and we realize that the objective reality which we experience through our senses is unreal and impermanent. Jnana-yoga is therefore the pursuit of true knowledge and it helps us learn the way to control our minds and senses in such a way so that we do not get attached to the world objects.

The Samkhya yoga, second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita believed to contain the summary of the teachings of Bhagavad Gita itself since it contains all the important concepts and ideas of the scripture. According to Samkhya school of thought, there are two realities, namely Prakriti and Purusa. Human beings are unreal, as our body and mind are immortal, so it is significant to know the reality. The reality is none other than Brahman, through the control over our sense organs and our desires; through detachment and self-control one can know this reality. According to the Bhagavad Gita, Jnana-yoga consists of the following practices-

1. Developing correct awareness of the mind, the body and the Atman or Self.
2. Purification of the body and the mind through self-discipline.
3. Acquiring true awareness of the world around and the SUPREME-Self beyond. (Knowledge of Sat (Truth) and Asat (Falsehood))
4. Practicing various disciplines and other techniques as a means to self-purification and elevation and elimination of thought process.

Once knowledge dawns on us, it helps us to clearly distinguish between the real and the unreal. This knowledge is gained by following the path of Jnana-Yoga. The person who learns to identify the difference between the real and the unreal, the permanent and impermanent is known as Jnani. This is the fundamental path of Jnana-Yoga, it helps in distinguishes between the atman and the body. So Bhagavad Gita emphasizes on performance of actions in a detached manner. To put it in Bhagavad Gita's words-

uddharedatmanatmanam  
natmanamavasadayet  
atmaivahyatmanobandhur  
atmaivaripuratmanah

uddared- elevate; atmana- through the mind; atmanam- the self; na- not; atmanam- the self; avasadayet- degrade; atma- the mind; eva- certainly; hi- indeed; atmanah- of the self; bandhuh- friend; atma- the mind; eva- certainly; ripuh- enemy; atmanah- of the self.<sup>4</sup>To put it differently, the mind should be trained so that it will not be attracted by the material world rather perform duties in a detached manner.

Jnana Marga refers to the path of knowledge that is significant for human beings for better understanding of the differentiation between permanent and impermanent. It is believed that man should gain intuitive knowledge of the fact that this body is impermanent and he/ she is not the doer because his real self is above bodily activities. This supreme knowledge causes a person to give up ordinary attachments and to

<sup>3</sup>Prabhupada, 1972: 3.9.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. 6.5, pg.335.

perform action without any expectations of its fruits. The prime goal of the path of knowledge is self-realization or realization of the fact that part of real/supreme self is within us, it is only we who fail to realize this fact and try to look for this reality in the outside world.

The present situation is the situation of disillusionment, disintegrated societies and psychological mal-adjustment are few common factors observed now a days. All these symptoms suggest that man has lost mental balance and mental stability due to unexpected outbreak of COVID 19. For stability of mind, learning and implementation of the teaching of Bhagavad Gita is essential. The first teaching is knowledge path; it is the intuitive knowledge of the monistic and non-dualistic reality, Brahman. According to this the ultimate reality is Atman or Brahman which is Pure Consciousness, Pure Bliss and Pure Knowledge. This ultimate reality is devoid of attributes or is attribute less. According to the path of knowledge Brahman is everything and everything is Brahman, there is no duality, no diversity at all. The problem of human beings is that, we think that whatever we perceive is the reality but whatever can be presented as an object is necessarily relative and unreal. The Absolute/ Real cannot be known as an object by the senses but this reality can be known only through spiritual experience.

However it is believed that path of knowledge alone is not sufficient for spiritual development of the individual. The path of Action or Nishkama Karma Marga is considered to be necessary corollary of the path of knowledge. The next section of this paper deals with the path of action.

## II

The word Karma is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kri', to do. Karma means action, both physical as well as mental actions performed by beings. Thus humans perform actions all the time, I am typing on the laptop is a form of karma, teacher delivering a lecture is karma; students listening to teacher's lecture is karma. Everything we do, physical or mental, are Karma, and our actions leave its marks on us. As we are embodied beings we cannot completely reject actions. The second path of teachings of Bhagavad Gita is the path of action. It can also be understood as work for work's sake. It means performance of actions without supposing any result from it (Nishkamakarma), action performed with a good intention without expecting any result from it.

The literal meaning of Nishkamakarma is 'desire less action' i.e. self-less action<sup>5</sup>. It means action performed without desiring or fearing the consequences or action performed with indifference to the outcome. It is used to describe the practice of doing actions without any expectations of the fruits (or results of actions). Bhagavad Gita recommends the ideal of Nishkamakarma, of duty done for its own sake, not out of desire for, or attachment to its consequences. No man can escape from karma as actions are influenced by Prakrti and its gunas.<sup>6</sup>

According to Sankhya school of thought there are two types of realities Prakrti and Purusa namely.<sup>7</sup> Both are eternal and independent of each other. Nature or Prakrti comprises of three Gunas or qualities, namely Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The highest of the three is Sattva, it is the principle of light, goodness and intelligence. Rajas, is the principle of change, energy and passion and Tamas appears as inactivity, dullness, heaviness and despair.<sup>8</sup> Bhagavad Gita has a three tiered concept of the self and agent. The first self is where the body is predominant over mind and soul. This is the tamasika stage of dullness, heaviness and inactivity. The second stage is where the mind rules over the body and the soul. It is the rajasika stage of passions, change and energy. The third stage of the self is the sattvika stage of goodness, light and intelligence, at this stage the soul rules over the mind and the body. So in all creation--in animals, plants, and men--we find the more or less typical manifestation of all these different forces.

As per the dominance of these qualities or Gunas, being performs his actions. Sattvika Karma is the action performed by the doer in a detached manner. The result of such action is goodness and happiness. Rajasvika Karma is the action performed by the doer thinking himself the supreme, he starts expecting results from his actions in this which gives rise to passion. Tamasika Karma is the action performed for the sake of selfishness and it gives rise to dullness. Bhagavad Gita emphasizes on the teaching of Nishkama Karma, according to this path actions should be performed without getting attached to the result of action. In Bhagavad Gita the path of Nishkama karma is beautifully expressed –

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p,293.

<sup>6</sup> Samkhya school of thought is the important orthodox school of Indian Philosophy. It believed in two realities namely Prakrti and Purusa. Prakriti comes from two Sanskrit roots, 'Pra' means the beginning, commencement and source of origin and 'Kruthi' means to perform or to form. Therefore, it means 'the initial creation' or alternatively this interesting word can also mean, 'to come forth into creation.' Gunas refer to the qualities, there are three qualities according to Samkhya, namely Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.

<sup>7</sup> Sharma, 1962: 135.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

brahmanyadhayakarmani  
sangamtyaktvakaroti yah  
lipyatenasapapena  
padma-patramivambhasa

brahmani—the Supreme Personality of Godhead; adhaya—resigning unto; karmani—all works; sangam—attachment; tyaktva—giving up; karoti—performs; yah—who; lipyate—is affected; na—never; sah—he; papena—by sin; padma-patram—lotus leaf; iva—like; ambhasa—in the water.<sup>9</sup>

One who performs his duty without attachment, surrendering the results unto the supreme God, is not affected by sinful action, as the lotus leaf is untouched by water. So according to Bhagavad Gita actions should be performed in a detached manner. Now the question comes to our mind- if a person performs unselfish actions, what he gains?

According to the teachings of Bhagavad Gita, person who performs actions in a detached manner gains the most. He reaches to the stage where the soul dominates the body and the senses and that person attains peace and happiness. His mind becomes calm and thoughtless; he performs his duty selflessly and in a detached manner.

Again the question that comes to our mind is- how can this path of teaching is helpful in the present pandemic situation? As we all know that the whole world at present is fighting from an unseen devil and few ways to remain safe from this devil includes wearing a mask, maintaining social distancing and washing hands frequently. So at present our duty is to perform these actions without thinking about this effects this virus is causing. To be mentally strong is the need of the hour at present and this is possible by following the second path of Bhagavad Gita that upholds the unattached performance of action. This aspect is Nishkama Karma Yoga, it indicates performance of actions without getting attached to its result. Bhagavad Gita states that one's right is to continue to work without expecting results from the actions, it points to unattached performance of actions.

There is some similarity between the teachings of Gita and Kant's ethics of categorical imperative, duty for duty sake. The path of action can be compared to one of the maxim of the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant, duty for the sake of duty.<sup>10</sup> The teaching of Nishkamakarma instructs that an agent has the right to prescribed activities (moral and social duties) but never at their results.

The point that Bhagavad Gita wants to emphasize is that the actions performed with the intention of getting its results cannot termed as moral actions as such actions lack moral worth. Now the question that comes to our mind is how detached actions are possible? Can we really train our minds to perform actions without thinking about the result/ effects of our actions? With the aim to answer these questions let us move to the third and the last teaching of Bhagavad Gita, the path of devotion. The upcoming section of this paper deals with the path of Bhakti or Devotion.

### III

In India, the land of spiritualism and sages; the technique of God- realization has been most elaborately laid down. Bhakti-yoga the third teaching of Bhagavad Gita consists in viewing God as the ultimate principle of all existence and seeking union with Him by surrendering oneself to Him. It is believed that the spiritual potentiality is innately present in every being. This spiritual potentiality in beings can be channelized by following the path of knowledge, action and devotion. The threefold path is the spiritual discipline without which the unlimited power of the soul cannot be experienced by the individual. The most important aspect of Bhakti is offering all actions to God and being unattached to both actions and their fruits. So without following the path of Bhakti or Devotion one cannot follow the path of Nishkama Karma. It is possible to perform unattached actions only if those actions are dedicated to the Ultimate Reality. Those who worship God, renouncing all actions in God, regard God as the supreme and mediating on Him with exclusive devotion are said to be fearless in performing their actions. Shandilya muni, the author of the Bhakti Sutra defines bhakti as 'supreme attachment to the Lord'. It is the only kind of attachment that does not reinforce the egoistic personality and its destiny. In Bhakti yoga, the practitioner is always a Bhakta a lover and the Divine is the beloved.

Unless a person submits himself and follow the teachings of Gita, path of knowledge, action and devotion, he will not experience peace and stability of the mind. Self-surrender to God makes Nishkamakarma psychologically justified and practicable. Whatever actions are performed by a being he/she surrender results of those actions to the Ultimate Reality or Brahman. Hence we find that the path of devotion makes possible the success of the path of knowledge and also the path of action, because of the faith in the Supreme God, which is

<sup>9</sup>Prabhupada, 1972: 5.10.

<sup>10</sup><https://www.iep.utm.edu/kantmeta/>

necessary for the execution of the Yoga or union of oneself with the Supreme Reality. To put it in Bhagavad Gita's words-

yetudharmamrtamidam  
yathoktamparyupasate  
sraddadhana mat-parama  
bhaktaste 'tiva me priyah

ye—one who; tu—but; dharmya—generosity; amrtam—understanding; idam—this; yatha—as; uktam—said; paryupasate—completely engages; sraddadhanah—with faith; mat-paramah—taking the Supreme Lord as everything; bhaktah—devotees; —such persons; ativa—very, very; me—Me; priyah—dear.<sup>11</sup> To put it differently, he who follows this imperishable path of devotional service and who completely engages himself with faith, making Me the supreme goal, is very, very dear to Me.

So in this pandemic situation it is significant to emphasize on the teachings for the Bhagavad Gita and follow all the three paths of knowledge, action and devotion. It is only by following this holistic teaching of the Gita, beings can develop stability and mental peace. The fact remains that knowledge, action and devotion go hand in hand. The triad of knowledge, action and devotion together gives rise to a healthy mind and healthy mind is essential for the healthy body. According to me teachings of Bhagavad Gita are most relevant in today's world as in the present global pandemic crisis situation almost everyone is facing stress and mental disturbances. Anti-values such as arrogance, anger, depression; conflicts are super-powering today's society. Teachings of Bhagavad Gita are the only solution to get rid of the anti-values and mental disturbances.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid. 12.20.